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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000510

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SUBJECT: BOUCHER DISCUSSES PARIS CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN WITH UAE
FOREIGN MINISTER, ALSO PAKISTAN

Ref: A) STATE 35860, B) ABU DHABI 407

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Ambassador Boucher discussed Afghan development needs and the June 12 Paris conference with United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi April 15, citing funding needs of \$12 to \$15 billion. Abdullah said joint Gulf Cooperation Council contributions were unlikely, but the UAE had given almost \$150 million (mostly in projects rather than cash) and would continue to assist. He made no specific funding commitment, yet discussed highways, agriculture, and university projects. Abdullah said Karzai needs to fight corruption more vigorously.

¶2. (C) Abdullah said a March 28 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) story on UAE troops in Afghanistan was an intentional part of "slowly but steadily" introducing UAE efforts to the public. He felt the UAE response (muted in the absence of any local press coverage of the troops or the breaking story) had been generally positive. Concluding with a discussion of key Pakistani personalities, Abdullah had positive things to say about Asif Zardari yet worried that Nawaz Sharif might take credit if the UAE assisted Pakistan economically. With a resident Pakistani population rivaling the number of Emirati citizens, the UAE must watch Pakistan closely. Abdullah thought the UAE government might be able to offer a geological survey of Pakistan after a U.S. overture was rebuffed. End summary.

Paris conference

¶3. (C) Assistant Secretary Boucher stressed to Abdullah the need for additional pledges for Afghan development at the Paris conference, which should focus on clear commitments rather than mere strategy sessions. The World Bank has articulated a strategy requiring \$42 billion for projects over five years; \$30 billion has been identified, leaving \$12 to \$15 billion as a logical target in Paris.

¶4. (C) Asked whether the Gulf Cooperation Council might coordinate a joint pledge in Paris, Abdullah bluntly said coordination had been dismal in the past and was not advisable this time. He said a joint relief effort after a quake in Turkey was a "disaster" with no mechanism to spend the funds. Each country seeks recognition for its contribution and prefers individual commitments -- the UAE's original \$30 million for Afghanistan (Tokyo conference) had grown to the point that the UAE was reaching \$150 million in contributions (mostly in discreet projects). UAE efforts will continue he said, without suggesting any particular pledge for Paris.

Possible aid projects

15. (C) Boucher noted prime projects, such as the Ring Road, that still need funding. He asked Abdullah to assess the project as an opportunity to help increase a "sense of national connectivity" in Afghanistan, citing Karzai's request for the Arabs to help "pave the streets of Kabul." The Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's International Affairs Director, Yousef al-Otaiba, said a proposal on funding highways was currently with Minister of Presidential Affairs Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed. A project to build a university in Herat (offsetting two colleges sponsored by Iran) was also worthy of UAE consideration, said Boucher. Al-Otaiba wanted to confirm that the university would be secular in nature, and added that the UAE had also sponsored Sheikh Zayed University in Khost.

16. (C) Abdullah said the UAEG was interested in agricultural projects if appropriate needs could be identified. He cited a German project on alternative crops but said the UAEG was "not managing to get good answers" regarding specifics. Boucher explained that a simple substitution of crops was not often attractive to the farmers, but that an overall rural development strategy was needed (dealing with transportation, electricity, cold storage) to shift focus away from opium. Also on the agricultural front, Abdullah noted that roses were being imported from Kandahar.

President Karzai needs to combat corruption

17. (C) Abdullah said President Karzai was seen as weak by his own people, was not doing enough to combat corruption, and did not face up to warlords sufficiently. Boucher noted USG efforts to press Karzai to improve governance, address corruption, and combat the narcotics trade. Boucher hoped Karzai would take steps before the

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Paris conference to increase donor confidence in Afghan stability, citing the Afghan election year as an opportunity to take bold steps; Abdullah noted that pressures "go both ways" in an election year and may also complicate Karzai's maneuverability.

Coverage of "confidential" troop presence

18. (C) Asked about UAE government intentions with regard to the March 28 British Broadcasting Corporation story on UAE troops in Afghanistan (which presence has consistently been classified and which has yet to be discussed in local media even since the story broke), Abdullah said the coverage was "on purpose" and done by a reporter whom the UAE "considers a good friend." The UAE government has decided to "slowly but steadily" introduce its work in Afghanistan in hopes of gaining acceptance for the effort in the international community. He added that it is difficult being the only Arab force deployed and the UAE would like to see others participate. Local (UAE national) reaction to the story had been positive, said Abdullah; he did not feel "any negativity" in the muted reaction, turning to Al-Otaiba for corroboration. Al-Otaiba noted that few Emiratis knew of the deployment beforehand; some expressed surprise, and pride, in the revelation. (Note: Reftel notes far less positive comments on the Internet, a primary forum for public discourse in the absence of any local media coverage. The UAE government has yet to change its posture of requesting that the U.S. keep the deployment confidential. End note.)

Pakistan

19. (C) In a brief discussion of key Pakistani political personalities, Abdullah said Asif Zardari was "down to earth" and a good listener/interlocutor. Abdullah expressed delight that Zardari has positive views toward India. Abdullah said the UAE was pleased that it had invested effort in pressing Musharraf to work with other political forces. The UAE had not tried seriously to work with Nawaz Sharif, however, in spite of Sharif's claims; the UAE does not really trust him and his stance on extremism is "quite odd." The UAE faces a dilemma, claimed Abdullah, in aiding Pakistan while Sharif has key portfolios. He sought advice on how to assist Pakistan without

strengthening Sharif's position in future elections. Abdullah said he was not optimistic that the current Pakistani government would last a year and said he had told Zardari that he might have won a better deal if he had applied more pressure on Sharif.

¶10. (C) The UAE will continue to watch Pakistan carefully, said Abdullah, because the Emirates face "huge problems" if something goes wrong in that country. The UAE hosts close to a million Pakistanis (roughly one Pakistani for each Emirati in the population) and has an historically close relationship with Pakistan. Boucher noted Pakistani hesitance to allow the U.S. to conduct a geological survey to ascertain potential resources in Pakistan; Abdullah suggested the UAE might be able to offer a survey without the same sense of "U.S. interference" in Pakistani sovereignty. Such a survey could benefit the Pakistani economy, said Abdullah.

¶11. (U) A/S Boucher approved this message.

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